

PETROȘANI DEPRESSION. A GEOGRAPHICAL-HISTORICAL AND TOPONYMIC STUDY

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Abstract: *Petroșani Depression. A Geographical-Historical and Toponymic study.* Situated between two ancient regions well populated since ancient times (Hațeg Country, in north, the soul of ancient Dacia, and Gorjana under the mountain Depression, south, mentioned in the famous „Sovereign Military Order of Malta” from 1247), the depression from the origins of Jiu River, became Jiu Valley or „Jiu Country” is an ancient Romanian land. Archeological evidence developed here human communities from the ancient times (Coțofeni culture, with over 4000 years old). There is an interesting toponymy, which can be distinguished in two overlapping layers of localities names: at the eastern extremity (around Petrila), with its older population (before the certification year – 1493), villages have their name, usually from rivers that were placed: Jieț, Taia, Răscoala, Cimpa and into the north Bănița or Jupâneasa. The West Jiu Valley (Romanian Jiu), where were produced the largest migrations of population, the settlements names are derived either by villages from where people came, either by name, because the same surname are common, until recently, for the most of the residents.

Rezumat: *Depresiunea Petroșani. Studiu geografico-istoric și toponimic.* Situată între două regiuni străvechi, bine populate încă din cele mai vechi timpuri (Țara Hațegului, la nord, sufletul Daciei străbune, și Depresiunea Gorjană de sub munte, la sud, pomenite în vestita „Diplomă a Cavalerilor Ioaniți” din 1247), depresiunea de la obârșiile Jiului, devenită Valea Jiului sau „Țara Jiurilor”, este un vechi ținut românesc. Descoperirile arheologice fac dovada stadiului de dezvoltare atins de către comunitățile omenești jiene, aflate în pragul istoriei (cultura Coțofeni, cu o vechime de peste 4000 de ani). Există o toponimie interesantă, în care se pot deosebi două straturi suprapuse de nume de localități: la extremitatea estică, cu fond vechi de populație, așezările componente își au numele de la râurile pe care erau așezate: Jieț, Taia, Cimpa, Răscoala, iar mai la nord Bănița sau Jupâneasa. În schimb, pe Valea Jiului de Vest (Jiul Românesc), unde s-au produs cele mai mari



admigrări, denumirile sunt derivate fie după satele de origine, fie după numele de familie, întrucât aceiași nume de familie se întâlnesc la majoritatea locuitorilor.

Key words: *Jiu Valley, toponymy, settlements, migration.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Valea Jiului, toponimie, aşezări, migrare.*

1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries on end, the Petroşani Depression, - one of the very few in the Southern Carpathians – has been a vast pastureland that helped the development of pastoral life. But, the discovery and exploitation of rich brown coal and pit coal made a lot of people from the neighbouring areas, and from longer distances even, come to work here. Consequently, the basic occupation of the population suffered a significant change. In the past few decades, coal being intensively mined and industrial units being built, urbanization got momentum. Today, the Petroşani Depression is one of the highest urbanized areas in this country. Obviously, there is anthropic pressure, too, but the process is kept under control, fact that has enabled a better organization of the geographical space.

In the Romanian national territory, Petroşani Depression is located in the central-western Romania, as intersected by the 46° North latitude parallel and 23° East longitude meridian. It borders the counties: Alba, Valcea, Gorj and Caraş-Severin (Figure 1).

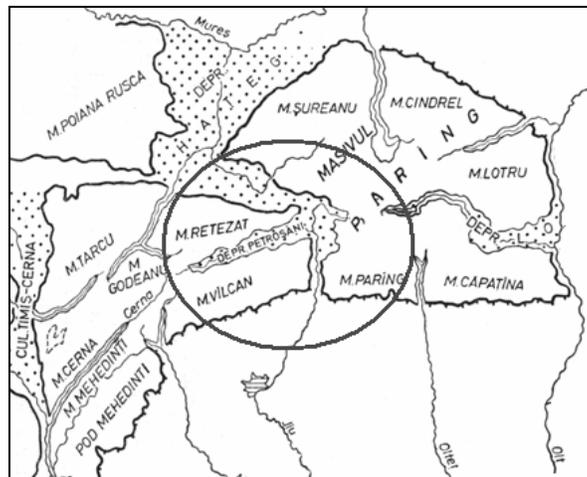


Figure 1: *Petroşani Depression location*
(source: Al. Roşu, 1980 – with changes)

Located along the Carpathian Mountains, the Jiu Valley is the gateway to Retezat National Park and other Carpathian destinations. Mountains from mountains groups of

Parâng and Retezat-Godeanu surround this area. The most important river that crosses the Jiu Valley microregion is Jiu River, with its tributaries East Jiu River and West Jiu River. On these two rivers are located the microregion's localities.

Jiu Valley has a triangular shape oriented WSW-ENE and a length of 60 km between localities Cimpa – Râscoala in the east and Câmpu lui Neag in the west. Width decreases from 9 km in the Livezeni and Petrila right, down to 1.5 km at Câmpu lui Neag.

Jiu Valley is a microregion which has three municipalities: Petroșani, Lupeni, Vulcan and 3 cities: Petrila, Uricani, Aninoasa, with a total population of 149,582 inhabitants. Administrative settlements in the Jiu Valley are made up of other smaller towns: Petrila has Lonea, Cimpa, Jieț, Râscoala and Tirici; localities belonging Petroșani are Dâlja Mare, Dâlja Mica, Pestera Bolii, Slătinoara; Aninoasa with its city Isroni; Vulcan has localities Paroșeni, Dealul Babii; localities belonging Uricani are Câmpu lui Neag and Valea de Brazi.

Upon passing through these places, Geo Bogza said: "meet in the same place, in the same strict square meter, current forms of life and those that were hundreds of years ago, here's what surprised me from the outset." (I. Velica, C. Schreter, 1993).

The origin of the settlements in the Jiu Valley is lost in the mists of years. History has just few documents which certify the existence of settlements in the earlier period. Historians researchers have established that the initial settlements in this area have emerged and developed through economic and demographic expansion of the Hațeg Country. Through the mountain trails and roads over lands strung along mountain Retezat, shepherds came in this area with their sheep and went to the rich lands that at first they used temporarily, and after that they took them in possession. Settlements were born centuries ago in the "swarming" process of the inhabitants from the Hațeg Country to these places.

The first traces of human presence in the Petroșani Depression have date for 4,000 years, there being found pottery from the primitive period, in the cave Straja Hill, Lupeni.

2. THE DACIAN-ROMAN PERIOD: FROM THE SECOND CENTURY BC TO THE SECOND CENTURY AD

On a height called Dealul Bolii (the Disease Hill), about 1000 m altitude, near the Bănița village, there was discovered a strongly fortified dacian city, an important link in the system of defensive fortifications from Orăștie Mountains. Surrounded on three sides by steep slopes, the city was accessible only from its northern side, this unique way being successively strengthened by a wave of rock and earth (IInd century BC), with a wall of limestone blocks, with an inside which was surrounding one terraces of the plateau, an acropolis and a wall, all dating back Burebista (82-44 BC).

In his time, Decebal (87-106 AD) added a wall of rough limestone and mortar, having at the two ends a wooden tower. The Bănița fortress was destroyed by Traian in the time of his wars with the Dacians. The fortress, as certified by archaeological investigations, submit a single period of destruction, without the possibility of specifying the time that this event occurred, in the first or the second Dacian War. The option calls for the destruction of the city on the Disease Hill in the first Dacian War, even during the mission entrusted by Traian to Lusius Quietus to shroud from the south Sarmizegetusa Regia. Once this important fortified objective have been eliminated from the strategic map of the land, the entire mountainous region from the south of Orăștie, the center of the

Dacian state from the two centuries preceding the Roman conquest, would have been remained defenseless from the Jiu Valley Basin.

Insignificant traces of Roman mining, between 106-271 AD, can be seen at Jieț, near Petroșani, where miners washed ancient gold. Archaeological discoveries have revealed a bust of the Mars God, god of war and agriculture, considered the father of Romulus and Remus. This one is now located in the Mining Museum in the city of Petroșani.

During the Middle Ages, the population of the Jiu Valley was far from flourishing. The native inhabitants were shepherds and lived in huts spread along the mountains. Some villages were centered near the river, but according to the documents, the entire population of the valley merely reached 400 people.

The first manuscript written about the Petroșani Depression dates from 1247, manuscripts belonging to the Hungarian King Bela IV (1235-1270), which notes that the Jiu Valley is a part of the Litovoi's Voivodeship, as Hațeg Country. Signing this diploma, Hungarian King was offering Severin Country with principalities of John and Farcas to Knights of Malta, except Litovoi and Seneslau Voivodeships: „...excepta terra kenezatus Lytuoy woiwode, quam Olatus reliquimus pont iidem hactenus tennerunt...” („... except the land of Litovoi's Voivodeship which one we leave to romanians as they have mastered it and so far ...”).

In 1416 appeared Sylotena as a settlement name. Once certified as „Possessio Sylotena” was being in mastered by the Densuș noble family with Răchitova, Mesteacăn and Totești. Village disappeared from the depression, name suggests that the name of valley came from it (Syl = Jiu).

At 18th January of 1493, Jiu Valley was given by the Hungarian king Vladislav the IInd Jagiello (1490-1516), to Mihaly Kendeffy, a nobleman from Râu de Mori. The king was kindness donating what does not belong to him. In the act of donation, written in Latin, can be found the first mention of human settlements that existed in those places: Peterella (Petrița), Malee (Maleia, near Petroșani), Ratonda (Rotunda, near Petroșani, is the same place as Lonea, according to some authors), Nyakmezeu (Câmpu lui Neag) Murylowar – Marisowar (Merișoara, near Vulcan), and short time after that, in 1501, Kaprisowar (Căprișoara in Vulcan). They were designated as areas or places of pastures, hay or plowing, and not localities, perhaps just some of them seem to have groups of houses and villages as subsequent documents attest.¹

In 1520 appeared a scroll through which was sign an understanding between Neagoe, the Lord of Romanian Country, and John Zapolya, Prince of Transylvania, which was attached the Jiu Valley to Romanian Country.

In 1700, the map of stolnic Constantin Cantacuzino is printed in Greek at Padua. The aforementioned is the first Romanian map and it introduces the name of the river Jiu in European cartography. Jiu is also mentioned, under the name Rhabon in Ptolemy Claudius's „Geography” (90 -168).

Cartographic documents of the Austrian Friedrich Schwantz, show the entire Petroșani Depression densely populated with farms, those being scattered everywhere along the Carpathian Mountains, seeming to form a single large village at one end to another. There was a general scattering of dwellings and groups of houses and just few households,

¹ Velica, I., Shreter, C., (1993), *Journey throw Jiu Valley Ages*, Destin Editure, Deva

meeting here and there, near the Jiu Valley, which later would have to form the nucleus of villages which have become the well known places today: Petrila, Petroșani, Vulcan, Lupeni and Uricani (Photo 1).



*Photo 1: The Jiu Valley on the cartographic documents of Friedrich Schwantz
(source: Velica, I., Shreter, C.,1993)*

The first inhabitants of today's **Petroșani** are twenty serfs from Petros. They were colonized in Petroșani around 1640. The Prussian lieutenant - colonel Götze mentioned Petroșani for the first time in a document around 1788 -1792, during his trip back from the Orient through Turkey and Romania. The text that refers to Petroșani asserts: „it is a very large village in which I saw a house built above ground.”²

„In 1733 **Petrila** was documentary certificated, and it became a city in 1950. Ancestors of the Petrila's people is said to be from the Sibiu's area.” (V. Tufescu, 1964)

„After 1733, the upper side of Jiu Valley has entered in a phase of popular and new villages appeared, and increasing the number of people by coming more families over the mountains to the rich pastures and meadows of this region. It is a popular pastoral phase, which can be traced in several steps. Also in connection with the predominantly pastoral occupation phase of the population in the Jiu Valley, it must be mentioned about the mountain celebration of the shepherds, who persisted in coming decades, until recent times. These were a kind of highly fairs and at the same time a kind of celebration, during which there were gathered people from Jiu Valley, just up the ridge, and they was exchanging products.” (Victor Tufescu, 1964)

From 1770 is the first documentary attestation of **Lupeni City**. Lupeni was founded as a consequence of the intense migration by people from the Strei Valley in Tara Hategului, drawn by the rich pastures and hay fields of the region. The settlers from Valea Lupului village are said to have founded Lupeni, while the villagers of Rau Barbat formed

² S. Stanca, Newspaper „Red Flag” from Petroșani – 26.03.1972

Barbateni. As Ion Preda said in 1985 in his book „Jiul Valley”: „the name derived from the name of Valea Lupului Wolf village (Wolf Valley village), from where came most of the residents” or Victor Tufescu, in 1982, in his book „People from the Carpathians”: „1788 - It is like a Lupeni’s colony, Bărbătenii de Sus village, formed by displaced people here from Râu Bărbat, which in time has become self-contained village.”

Establishments in Lupeni were first documented in 1770, but recent archiological findings prove that life in this area goes back to the Stone Age. During the Roman occupation, gold deposits in the Jiu Valley, bearing alluvia, were exploited sporadically.

Today, the town is looking for a new identity after the dominating mining industry underwent a dramatic change triggered by Romania's new political and economic realities. Simultaneously with the bankruptcy of some mine-related firms, privately owned businesses appeared in Lupeni, and are now an important presence in the town's economy. During the last few years, there have appeared businesses in tourism, the timber industry, bakery, trade etc. Coal remains, however, the main natural resource of the area. Although they have been exploited for more than 130 years, the pit coal deposits are the largest in the country.

„The first certified Paroșeni land dates from 1773 and the name is deriving from the name of the village of Paros.” (I. Preda, 1985)

The **Uricani** locality is first mentioned in a certified document dated 1818, when the locality was referred to as Hobiceni-Uricani, the name it carried until the union in 1918. The name of Uricani is derived from the name Hobița (listed in documents from 1411) and Uric (from 1473) from Hațeg Country. After Ardeal’s union with the mother country, the locality's name was changed to Uricani.

„**Câmpu lui Neag** appeared under the title of Câmpulu Neagu in 1835.” (H. Matei, 1967). Câmpu lui Neag, according to some legends, would carry the name in memory of an outlaw, Neag, who ran frightened by the danger threatening from the feudal oppressors from Hațeg Country (by some) or Oltenia (by others), together with other outlaws, whose descendants are still in the village, under the name of the oldest family clans.

„Following the local tradition, the Câmpu lui Neag village takes its name from the outlaw named Neagu, who has run from Wallachia, because of his fear against Turks, with his comrades, has retreated into the solitude of these mountains in the back of the place known today Dosul Pribeagului. They have built houses where Jiu has the most open meadow, giving their settlement name after name of their chief. Here are the names of some families who have come with Neagu: Hamza, Mojoatcă, Muscalu, Manoli, Vinț, Câmp, Dumitrescu, Stanciu and family Căndea came from Râu de Mori from Hațeg Country.” (I. Velica, C. Schreter, 1993).

„Another version says that the Prince of Wallachia, Basarab the Young (Țepeluș) sent an army corp to support Paul Chinezul’s famous battle at the Capul Pâinii (13th of October 1479). An oltenian man from his army, caught by missing of his wife, is having decided to short the road across the mountain. He liked the place from depression and he returned not long after and became the founder. Founder, but not first citizen, because traces and evidence of living in these places have been since ancient times.” (H. Matei, 1967).

„In a document dated 1457, issued by the office of the Hungarian King Ladislaus V, between the owners of the Baru Village from Hațeg Country is mentioned Neag son of the nobleman from the Baru, along with Stan and Dan, Dragomir's sons. Is there any

connection between him and the name of the Câmpu lui Neag village? Distance would not support a link.” (Șt. Pascu, 1986).

Over time, the village of Câmpu lui Neag functioned as either a political commune or a village belonging to the Uricani locality. In 1965, Uricani was declared a city, and the villages of Valea de Brazi and Câmpu lui Neag villages were added under its jurisdiction.

Here it’s made a map which show the population translation from Hațeg Country to Petroșani Depression (Figure 2).

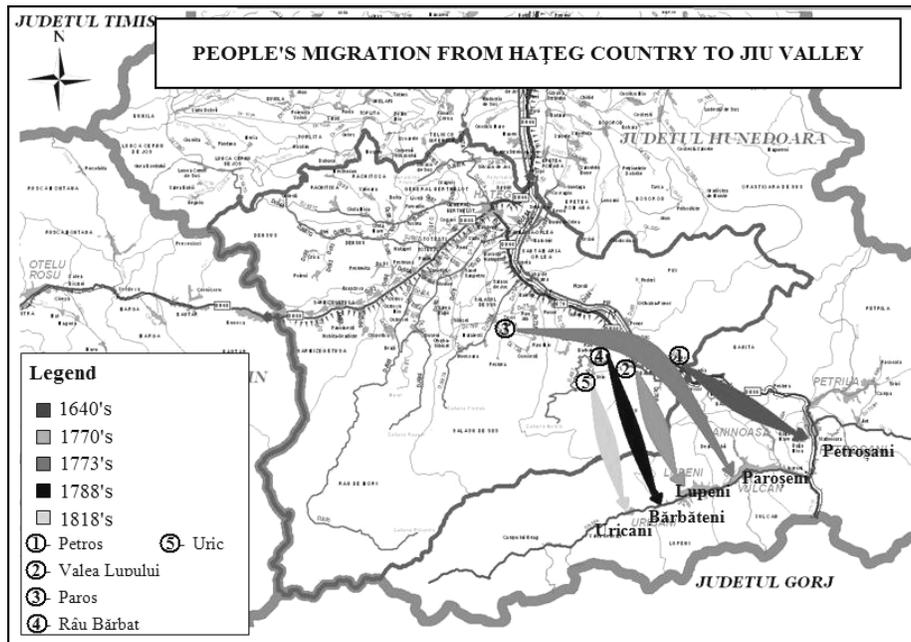


Figure 2: People’s migration from Hațeg Country to Jiu Valley

After 1840, as the mining exploitations began, the social landscape changed dramatically. The foreign mining companies brought Polish, Czech, Slovak, Austrian, Hungarian and Romanian miners to the Jiu Valley. The Romanian miners were brought from Baia Mare or The Apuseni Mountains.

The native inhabitants of the Jiu Valley (known as „momârlani”) lived an ancient and quite rustic form of life, mostly extinct in other parts of the country. Its recent one hundred years of industrialism had changed it drastically no doubt, however to this day, centuries-old customs and traditions are still preserved. The economic development and the permanent increase of population imposed changes on the city’s urban aspect.

Today, the population of the Jiu Valley is estimated to be between 140.000 and 150.000 inhabitants, largely concentrated in the region’s six mining towns – Petroșani, Lupeni, Vulcan, Uricani, Petrița, and Aninoasa, but also including small villages such as Câmpul lui Neag and Lonea. Eighty percent of the workforce depends upon the mines for

work and income. In 1990 there were 15 active mines in the Jiu Valley. Eight of these (i.e., Dâlja, Iscroni, Lonea-Pilier, Petrița-Sud, Câmpul lui Neag, Uricani, Valea de Brazi and Bărbăteni) have been closed. The Valea de Brazi, Bărbăteni and Uricani Mines were closed recently in 2004, 2005 and 2006, respectively. For now, the five active mines are as follows: Petrița, Lonea, Livezeni, Paroșeni, Vulcan and Lupeni.

3. TOPONYMIC ASPECTS ABOUT THE TOWNS FROM THE PETROȘANI DEPRESSION

On the second part of this article we want to show some toponymic aspects about the towns from the Petroșani Depression.

Petroșani

The municipality of Petroșani was founded in the 17th century (around 1640). In 1720, an Austrian cartographer mentions that the entire Jiu Valley was intensely populated and settlements could be seen from one end to the other. During the 1818 census, Petroșani had 233 inhabitants, while the entire Valley counted 2550. During this time, the main activity of the people was shepherding and no urban settlement had appeared yet. Around 1840 coal surface mining began in Petroșani, Vulcan and Petrița. The population encountered a massive increase only in the 20th century during the communist regime, as many workers were brought in from other parts of the country.

Vulcan

This town is named after the Vulcan Pass that connects the Jiu Valley to Oltenia, itself being derived from Slavic „vlk”, meaning „wolf”. The coal resources of the region were discovered in 1788 while the Austrian General Landau defended Vulcan from the Ottoman Turks. One night the soldiers could not put out the camp fire they made, as the piles of coal underneath had caught fire. General Landau thought that he could stop the Turks without a fight by setting piles of coal on fire. The Turks noted the large numbers of fires on the heights and thought that the Austrian army was much larger than theirs and retreated.

Lupeni

It is one of the oldest and largest towns in the Jiu Valley. It is located on the banks of the West Jiu river within the Jiu Valley, at a height varying between 630 m (in the east) and 760 m. The name is derived from the Romanian „lup” meaning „wolf”. It was the site of the Lupeni Strike of 1929.

Petrița

Petrița is an ancient settlement, but its existence was not documented until 1493 in a donation letter between Vladislav the First, King of Hungary and a Romanian prince named Mihai Cănde. Interestingly, the name of the town was noted in 1733 as coming from the Latin word “petrinus” („pietros” in Romanian), which can be translated into English to mean “of stone”, a reference to the large coal deposits in the area that would become a profitable export in the Industrial Revolution. The exploitation of coal deposits in and around Petrița made the town grow as a single-industry town, revolving either around the mining of coal or the processing of the coal mined there, which is listed under the grade “Pitcoal”. Mining operations began in 1840, but the town would remain sparsely populated until the arrival of Moldovian workers forced to relocate by the former president of

Romania Nicolae Ceaușescu under Communist rule. The restructuring of the economy since 1989 has led to a decrease in production and supply for the region, including Petrila.

It was the site in recent times of the Petrila Mine disaster, wherein two methane gas explosions in a coal mine on November 15, 2008 killed at least 12 miners and/or rescue workers. This is not the first time this millennium a coal mine in Petrila has suffered such an incident; another similar incident occurred in 2001.

Uricani

The Uricani locality is first mentioned in a certified document dated 1818, when the locality was referred to as Hobiceni-Uricani, the name it carried until the union in 1918. The name of Uricani is derived from the name Hobita (listed in documents from 1411) and Uric (from 1473) from Hateg Land. After Ardeal's union with the mother country, the locality's name was changed to Uricani. Over time, the village of Câmpu lui Neag functioned as either a political commune or a village belonging to the Uricani locality. In 1965, Uricani was declared a city, and the villages of Valea de Brazi and Câmpu lui Neag villages were added under its jurisdiction.

Aninoasa

Aninoasa is the oldest town in Hunedoara county, being mentioned as far back as 1453 (Figure 3).

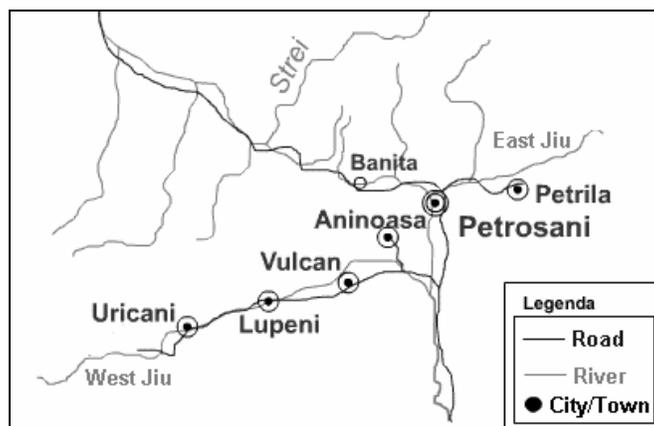


Figure 3: Main towns in Petroșani Depression
(Source www.jiuvalley.com – with changes)

From the towns' map in Petroșani Depression it can be observed a relatively uniform distribution of cities in the valley territory, due to the past settlements, settlements that were scattered along the upper courses of Jiu, East and West, respectively.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it can be said that there is an interesting toponymy, which can be distinguished in two overlapping layers of localities names: at the eastern extremity (around

Petrila), with its older population (before the certification year – 1493), villages have their name, usually from rivers that were placed: Jieț, Taia, Răscoala, Cimpa and into the north Bănița or Jupâneasa. The West Jiu Valley (Romanian Jiu), where were produced the largest migrations of population, the settlements names are derived either by villages from where people came, either by name, because the same surname are common, until recently, for the most of the residents. Today, the population of the Jiu Valley is estimated to be between 140.000 and 150.000 inhabitants, largely concentrated in the region's six mining towns – Petroșani, Lupeni, Vulcan, Uricani, Petrila, and Aninoasa, but also including small villages such as Câmpul lui Neag and Lonea.

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